



(U) A Change of Career (repost)

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Run Date: 11/26/2004

This article first appeared in June. We asked SIGINTers to relate interesting stories of how they came to work at NSA... (U)

(U) I was trained as a conservator of library and archives materials. From the time I was a child, I had been a collector of books, not for their content, but for their bindings, and all through my teenage years I purchased books in the antique shops and flea markets of South America, volumes with mother-of-pearl, ivory, elaborately tooled leather covers and elaborate clasps. Thus, when I obtained a specialized masters degree in conservation from [REDACTED], involving organic chemistry, art history and bookbinding, it seemed a perfect fit.

(U) Over the next 18 years, I worked as an art, archives and book conservator at [REDACTED]. Conservators are responsible for the long term preservation of the cultural and historical record of humankind, which gives a great sense of importance to the field, and as part of this community I derived enormous satisfaction from my work. Conservators often treat objects many hundreds of years old, and expect that the work they do will be seen and handled by scholars 100 years hence or more, and indeed, I treated manuscripts by D.H. Lawrence, repaired bookbindings by William Morris, pieced together fragile civil war maps, [REDACTED].

(U) After a decade in my profession I had risen to become a Fellow of the American Institute of Conservation, in which I also held elected office, and was regularly consulted by colleagues around the country.

(U//FOUO) But something was missing. I felt as though it was time to take on a new challenge. [REDACTED]. I applied in 1999 and was told that the Agency did not need my languages, Spanish and French.

(U//FOUO) Then came September 11th. We drove home around the empty Beltway with the jets scrambling out of Andrews Air Force Base above our heads, but for my family the worst came late in the day when a call from my daughter's teacher brought the news that her friend [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]'s family had been killed when their plane crashed into the Pentagon. [REDACTED], 8 years old, her sister [REDACTED], 3 years old, and their parents, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], had been deeply loved members of our community. I spent weeks attending memorial services surrounded by stunned fourth graders, and then I resubmitted an application to NSA.

(U//FOUO) Time passed, as it will with security clearances, and by the time the offer finally came, my job situation had changed somewhat. I had received two promotions, [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] It was a very difficult decision, but in the end, the anticipation of greater personal job satisfaction won out over the seduction of trappings and externals, and I accepted the offer.

(S//REL) I have now landed in the Pakistan shop after a year of Urdu language training. My cramped desk is in a crowded bullpen, in a dark corner of the Headquarters building, and when

friends ask me how I like my new job, I tell them the following: it is the best job I have ever had, as well as the most difficult. I can barely tear myself away from my desk at the end of every day. The work is fascinating, and endless, and frustrating, and I would not change my decision for any price. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

(U) Finally, I try to retain my sense of the long term. The day will come when the reports we write may be deposited in a SCIF* [REDACTED]. When they are declassified many years from now, on that mysterious X1 date, historians will pore over them as they write the histories and biographies of our time. I feel as though I have gone from preserving [REDACTED] history [REDACTED] to, in some very small way, contributing to it.

(U//FOUO) On a related note, see [REDACTED] story [From Academia to the Agency](#).

*(U) Notes:
SCIF = Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility

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